

How about Coaching for Improved Performance?

How can you be a successful manager? Be a successful coach. This is the advice given by one of the nation's best-known business training consultants, Ferdinand F. Fournies, in his book *Coaching for Improved Work Performance*. Traditionally management training has emphasized increasing a manager's knowledge but not his or her ability to apply that knowledge. The result is that managers can describe reasons why people are not performing correctly but have difficulty describing the form that the performance would take if it improved. Too much time is spent telling managers about the things that should be done, not the way to do them.

A good manager must recognize that management is getting things done through others. Your success is measured not by the things that you yourself do but rather by the things that your people do, the result. When your people are successful, you will be recognized as a successful manager. When your people are failing, you will be viewed as an unsuccessful manager, no matter what you are doing. The obvious conclusion then is to do everything in your power to help them be as successful as possible, since you succeed only when they succeed.

By using a coaching process, managers can improve the performance of their subordinates both quantitatively and qualitatively. The elements that affect performance are presented in the following formula:

$$\text{Results} = \text{Abilities (Performance + Training)} + \text{Motivation} + \text{External Influences}$$

Results are an outcome of performance. However, what affects performance? Everyone has certain abilities they bring to a job. These are combined with the performance or responsibilities that are assigned and the training provided. Motivation influences performance. It is the consequences for doing or not doing what is expected. External influences can manifest themselves through, say, inadequate equipment or knowledge.

The coaching analysis answers the question, What is influencing unsatisfactory performance? The following questions summarize the approach:

- Is the unsatisfactory performance worth your time and effort? If not, don't waste your time on it.
- Does the person know the performance is unsatisfactory? If not, let him or her know; provide feedback.
- Does the subordinate know what is supposed to be done and when? If not, fill him or her in and work on planning.

- Are there obstacles beyond the subordinate's control? If so, remove them.
- Does the subordinate know how to perform the assigned task? If not, train the person and provide opportunities for practice.

The correct course of action in any of the opposite cases is to redirect the subordinate's behavior through coaching. But to redirect this behavior you must first get his or her agreement that a problem exists. Discuss alternatives and agree upon solutions. Follow up on the subordinate to measure results and recognize any achievement when it occurs.

Throughout this process, you can guarantee failure in changing your subordinate's behavior by not getting the subordinate involved, not giving specific feedback, concentrating on attitude rather than behavior, assuming the subordinate understands that a problem exists, assuming that he or she knows what has to be done to solve the problem, not following up to ensure that the action agreed upon has been taken, or failing to acknowledge or praise the subordinate when the problem is corrected.

There is no secret or rule to being a successful manager. As with all of life, you must be prepared. Know ahead of time what has to be done and follow a specific plan of action; don't make it up as you go along. Compare your actions and the outcome with what you have planned. Then adjust for next time. Management is a function you perform to influence the outcome of the race. It is recognizing those runners during the race who have never won but have run the first hundred yards faster than they ever did before.

To learn more about the coaching process I strongly recommend reading Ferdinand F. Fournies book *Coaching for Improved Work Performance* (Liberty Hall Press, 1998, ISBN 0-8306-3054-6).

Editor's note: To set the record straight, the feature in the January 2000 issue "Technology-Enhanced Project Management" listed \$935 million as the amount of construction placed in the ground by the engineering department of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The correct amount is \$535 million. Our sincere apologies to our readers and, especially, to the author, Peter J. Zipf. Without the dedication he shows in regularly submitting articles, we would all be left a little wanting.

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